

Correcting Priorities – Putting housing ahead of fossil fuels

February 2021

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.- Romans 12:2

We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race.

We pledge ourselves to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur. We will work for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond....

We are concerned with the basic human rights of future generations and will urge the wise use of energy, the protection of the environment and the replenishment of the earth's resources for their use and enjoyment.

Statement to the Nation, Uniting Church in Australia, Inaugural Assembly, 1977

In its October 2020 budget, the Commonwealth Government exhibited a deeply disappointing set of priorities for addressing homelessness and climate change.

Lack of priority in addressing homelessness

The budget announced a \$41.3 million reduction in funding for homelessness services from July 2021. There will have been a 10% cut in funding to address homelessness between 2017 and 2021. Commonwealth Government funding for social housing and homelessness has decreased from \$2.3 billion in the 2010 – 2011 financial year to \$1.8 billion in the 2021 -2022 financial year. The Government plans to cut the funding further, to \$1.6 billion in the 2023-2024 financial year.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, there were 116,000 homeless people in Australia, and more than 800,000 people struggled to pay rent.

In 2019, homelessness services already were turning away 250 people a day due to a lack of funding to provide support.

Anglicare Australia have stated that following the latest cut to the JobKeeper payment on 31 December that only 0.02% of rental properties will be affordable for a single person out of work.

After being homeless for many years, Gary now works at a job he loves with a local transport company – after finding a home with a local community housing provider. He has also travelled to Sydney to complete a construction course.

Since having a place to call home, Gary has taken up running and raised more than \$10,000 for local charities Ronald McDonald House, Soul Cafe, and the Samaritans.

"Having a home makes it much easier to study and hold down a job. I used to take from the community. Now I want to give back to the community. It's never too late to turn your life around."

Gary from Newcastle – From the Everybody's Home website <https://everybodyshome.com.au>

Backing Fossil Fuel Corporations

The October 2020 Commonwealth Government budget announced financial support for fossil fuel corporations. The budget included \$28.3 million for gas corporations to extract gas from five areas, starting with the Beetaloo Basin in the Northern Territory and the North Bowen and Galilee Basin in Queensland. A further \$10.9 million will be given to gas corporations to build pipelines and other infrastructure. On 17 December 2020, the Commonwealth Government announced a further \$50 million in government hand-outs to gas corporations for exploration in the Beetaloo Basin to speed up gas production from the area. On 14 January 2021, the Commonwealth Government

announced a further \$217 million in government funding to upgrade roads that will allow the expansion of the Beetaloo Basin.

More alarmingly, the Commonwealth Government announced that if private investors did not fund an expansion of natural gas production, it would step in and force such growth to take place. In particular, unless private investors commit to building 1,000 MW of power generation before 2023, the Commonwealth Government will fund a gas-fired power station in the Hunter Valley.

Natural gas is a fossil fuel. Use of natural gas for power generation will contribute to increasing the impacts of climate change. In 2020, Australia was the largest producer and exporter of natural gas in the world. Rising emissions from the gas industry has already been cancelling out emissions reduction efforts across the rest of the Australian economy. Further expansion of the gas industry will lead to more damage to the climate system.

The scientific evidence is that climate change is already causing harm to the lives of hundreds of millions of people across the globe. Climate change will cause increased extreme weather events (floods, droughts, heat waves), rising sea levels, and food production loss. The latest analysis by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) makes a case for governments, businesses and communities taking effective collective action to limit greenhouse gas emissions to constrain the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C.

People living without adequate housing are particularly at risk from the impacts of extreme weather events. Climate change will further exacerbate inequalities already experienced by many people who have pre-existing vulnerabilities like inadequate housing, particularly among First People communities in remote locations.

What You Can Do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP
Treasurer
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Salutation: Dear Treasurer

Points to make in your letters:

- Express deep concern that the Government has decided to prioritise support for gas corporations over meeting community needs, such as housing, in its last budget.
- Ask that in the 2021 – 2022 budget the Commonwealth Government commit to funding the construction of 30,000 social housing properties over four years, which would contribute 18,000 construction jobs.
- Ask that in the 2021 – 2022 budget the Commonwealth Government also reverse its \$41.3 million cut to homelessness services.
- Ask that the Government cease providing valuable government funds to gas corporations and instead invest that money in addressing homelessness.
- Express concern about the harmful impact climate change is already having in Australia and across the globe.
- Further, express concern that gas is a fossil fuel that contributes to greenhouse gas emissions and ask that the Commonwealth Government cease supporting an increase in gas production. Instead, it should be assisting households and businesses to transition away from the use of gas.
- Ask the Commonwealth Government to abandon its plan to fund a 1,000 MW gas-fired power station in the Hunter Valley. Instead, it should support the expansion of renewable energy generation and energy efficiency measures.